

## Not unusual by Idrab

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## Not unusual

Billy Hargrove goes missing some time during the weekend in the end of November.

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Will Byers wakes up screaming at ten to twelve on Friday night. His mother and brother runs into his room, takes him in their arms and speaks softly to him until his screams turns to sobs, and then to sniffles.

"What's wrong, baby?" asks his mother.

"I don't know", Will answers.

"Was it a nightmare?"

He nods.

"What was it about?"

"I ... I don't remember."

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At the exact same time, young Jane's eyes opens where she is lying in the dark, in the cabin she shares with Chief Jim Hopper. She furrows her brow, takes a deep breath and stares straight up into the ceiling.

She doesn't fall asleep again until just before the sun comes up.

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Billy's disappearance isn't reported until Monday, when he doesn't show up for school, but even then people aren't very concerned.

(It's not unusual for Billy to skip school, after all.)

The school calls his father when he doesn't show up, and his father, in turn, contacts the police.

"Well," the officer says. "Maybe he's just skipping?"

"I haven't actually seen my son since Friday", is the answer.

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Turns out, no one has seen Billy since Friday.

"He drove me to school in the morning", says Billy's sister, Max. "After that, I haven't seen him."

"Not once, during the weekend?"

She shrugs.

"No. He's out a lot during the weekends. And when he's at home, he's usually in his room. I mean, it's not like we hang out or anything."

When asked if she noticed anything different with her brother the last time she saw him, she says:

"Step-brother. And no. He was his usual asshole self. Didn't say a word to me until he told me to get the hell out of his car."

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"He's probably left town", says Tommy, one of the boys Billy hangs with, when asked. "It's basically all he ever talked about. He hated this place. Said he'd go back to California as soon as he turned 18. He probably just couldn't wait."

He lights a cigarette, takes a drag and waves it around to indicate everything around him.

"And honestly, can you blame him? This place is a shithole."

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Billy's father sighs when asked about his son.

"Billy has always been a problem child. I'd say since his mother died, but honestly he was showing tendencies even before that. He doesn't show respect to anyone in this family, he's getting into fights and coming home all beat up, he shirks his responsibilities ..."

He shakes his head.

"I don't know what to do with him, most of the time."

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"Friday night. He stumbled in, looking like he'd been in another fight, refusing to say what had happened. Screamed and cursed ... he was probably drunk or, or something. It was a good thing Susan was out of town, and Max spent the night with a friend. I don't want to think of what would have happened if they'd been home. What he could have done."

"Okay. Then what happened?"

"He went into his room, slammed the door. I left him alone – he usually needs time to cool off after something like that. On Saturday, I knocked on his door, and when I opened it he was gone. The window was open, his car wasn't in the driveway."

"And you didn't think to report it then?"

"Look, officer. My son is ... he's not like most kids. It's not unusual for him to disappear for days on end."

The officer nods, puts away his pad and his pencil and walks to the door. Just before he leaves, he turns around and asks:

"One more thing, mr Hargrove. Your hand. What happened to it?"

Billy's father looks down, briefly touches the bruised knuckles of his right hand with his left. Looks up, jaw clenched.

"I punched a wall. Dealing with my son can be ... frustrating, at times. But he's my son, and now he's missing."

"I see. Thank you, mr Hargrove."

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They find a few drops of blood on the floor beside Billy's bed, and on his mattress. But he'd been in a fight, so that's only to be expected.

(With Billy, a little blood is not unusual.)

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Still. All possibilities must be investigated.

"I didn't do anything to him!" Steve Harrington says when Chief Hopper comes to talk to him. "What the fuck, man?"

Hopper holds up his hands to show that he didn't mean any harm, and says:

"Okay, calm down. I'm not saying you did anything. I'm just saying, that Billy's dad says that Billy came home looking like he'd been in a fight, and, well ..."

He gestures to Steve's face, which still haven't healed completely. There's still a hint of yellow bruises, and a red mark on his chin.

Steve narrows his eyes.

"Well it wasn't me. You really think that I wouldn't look worse than I already do if I'd been in another fight with him?"

Hopper shrugs, and Steve snorts.

"I'm glad someone took him down a notch though. Billy is an asshole. If I find out who it was who beat him up, I might just buy the guy a beer."

"If you find out who it was, you'll *tell me*. Got it?"

They look each other in the eye.

"Sure thing, Chief."

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A few days passes, and there is still no trace of either Billy or his car. It is generally accepted that he just got sick of it all, and up and left. Went back to California, or somewhere else that wasn't Hawkins, Indiana.

He didn't say anything to anyone, didn't let on that he was planning to leave, but honestly? That's not unusual for Billy Hargrove.

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Still. *All* possibilities must be investigated.

"Jane?"

"Yes?"

"Have you felt anything ... off, lately?"

Jane looks up at Hopper with big eyes. Nods once.

"Like, *Upside Down-off*?" Hopper clarifies.

She looks troubled for a second, then shakes her head.

"No. Why?"

Hopper drags a hand over his face.

"Nothing. A missing kid. He's probably fine, I just wanted to make sure there wasn't anything ... you know, from that place. Going on."

She looks down.

"I've felt nothing. From there."

"Okay, okay. Thanks, kid."

Hopper turns and walks away, and Jane furrows her brow and mutters, quietly:

"*Off.*"

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Billy's not missed, not really. It takes a week or so before the new pecking order in school is established, but after that, not many people gives Billy's disappearance a second thought. He wasn't there for very long, after all, and they realize after he's gone that he didn't really make any friends. Certainly not ones that miss him.

"Good riddance, if you ask me", says Lucas Sinclair darkly one day, when they mention it in passing outside the arcade. He then looks guilty and looks to see if Max heard him, but if she does she doesn't let on.

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And no one disagrees with him, anyway.

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Hopper is having a smoke with Joyce Byers one evening, and sighs heavily.

"I'm so sick and tired of all the weird shit going on in this town lately."

She waves her cigarette, raises her shoulders and eyebrows in a "what"-gesture. He shakes his head.

"The Billy kid. Disappearing like that, and so soon after everything went down."

"But Hop, you don't think that it has anything to do with what happened, do you? Do you think ...?"

He shakes his head again.

"No, no. I don't. The kid hated it here, everyone knows it. He probably went back to California. I have some people there that I've asked to keep a look out for him, they'll call back if they hear anything. It's just ..."

Another sigh.

"So many disappearances and strange happenings in such a small town? In such a short period of time? Sometimes I wish I'd become a ... I don't know, a carpenter or something. Anything but a cop."

They look at each other. Chuckle. Finish their cigarettes, and go inside.

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Hopper's people in California never does call back.

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This is what they know:

Billy Hargrove showed up in school on Friday, acting normal. Well, normal for him; he was limping slightly and wore a split lip like it

was a badge of honor, stole a cigarette from another student and pushed a younger boy into the lockers.

His basketball coach said that Billy had went to see him just before lunchtime, and that he'd chewed the kid out for getting in a fight – he couldn't help his team win with a bad knee. Billy insisted he could play, the coach said no, and Billy flipped him off and stormed out of there.

Several people saw him getting in his car and drive off, playing his music loud. This wasn't unusual for him, though, so no one would have guessed that it was going to be the last time they saw him.

He was seen outside the gas station a few hours later, filling up his car and then driving off.

An hour or so later, someone saw him on the side of the road, leaning against his car, smoking.

Later that evening, his father claims he got home, looking worse for wear, and shut himself in his room.

A man who was on his way back to Hawkins after a week of business claims he saw Billy's car leaving Hawkins around 3.30 am on Saturday. He didn't see who was driving, but whoever was in the driver's seat drove fast and reckless, which was why the man even remembered the incident at all.

That was Billy all right. After all, it wasn't unusual for him to drive fast and reckless.

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That's all they know. "All". Which is nothing, really. Billy is gone, and no one knows where he went. And after some time, it also seems like no one cares, not *really*.

(And that is not unusual, either, when it comes to Billy Hargrove.)